

NSC BRIEFING

NO CHANGE IN CLASS. II

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THAILAND

21 September 1957

- I. The bloodless coup which toppled the Phibun government of Thailand on the night of 16-17 September was executed by army troops with such speed and efficiency that [REDACTED] "as clean as a clean H-bomb." 25X1C
- II. Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat who ordered the coup appears now to be firmly in control of the country and is moving rapidly to consolidate his position.
- A. He moved first to neutralize the police who were under the command of his rival, General Phao--now in exile in Switzerland.
1. "Housecleaning" of police department now underway with militarized units disbanded and their equipment going to the army.
- B. Sarit has personally announced the firing of the air force and navy chiefs.
- C. The king, who reportedly played an active role in promoting the coup, has publicly endorsed Sarit's takeover and has helped out by ordering the dissolution of the national assembly and new elections within 90 days.
1. He has also approved a new slate of 123 appointed members (nominated by Sarit and mostly military officers) to serve as the legislature in the interim.
- III. Although there will undoubtedly be pressure--from leftist elements who had urged Sarit to move against Phibun--for a loosening of ties with the West, Thailand's pro-West foreign policy is unlikely to be drastically altered.

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- A. New provisional government, as approved by Sarit, was established 21 September and is headed by pro-Western Pote Sarasin.
1. Pote, 52, was for many years ambassador to the US until his installation in July 1957 as Secretary General of SEATO.
  2. In conversation with Ambassador Bishop prior to his appointment as premier, Pote categorically stated he would not take job unless assured there would be no change in Thailand's Western orientation and that no Communists were to serve in his cabinet.
- B. New coup leaders even claim their regime will be more pro-West than its predecessor, citing the alleged contacts of Phibun and Phao with the Chinese Communists and with ex-Premier Roidi in China among reasons justifying coup.
1. Sarit himself has publicly acknowledged the value of US military and economic aid and has endorsed Thailand's membership in SEATO.
- C. Another factor weighing against accommodation to leftist elements is regime's identification as the champion of the monarchy.
- IV. There is little doubt, however, that the somewhat parochial Sarit will be more suspicious of Americans than Phibun and more difficult to deal with.
- A. It also remains to be seen whether he can maintain internal stability over the long run.
- B. Chief threat to future stability is most likely to arise from factionalism among his more avaricious military followers, although he will have to contend with the divergent aims of his royalist and leftist supporters.

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25X1C

1. [REDACTED] Sarit is already having trouble keeping the lid on demands for a division of the spoils of victory; [REDACTED] army headquarters is a "morass of confusion." 25X1C

V. Interesting and possibly significant development, has been the apparent emergence of the king and his advisers into the political arena.

25X1C

- A. [REDACTED] the king not only initiated planning of coup, but had to press Sarit to take action.
- B. Whatever the extent of his participation, the king may have acted from fear that Phibun was planning to bring back Pridi--who is alleged to be implicated in the death of his brother in 1946--as well as by disgust with the more seamy side of the government's activities.
- C. King and royalists will have to be careful, however, not to provoke the power-and-money-hungry men in whose hands rests the real power in Thailand--the royalists need Sarit much more than Sarit needs them.